(b) whether Executive Director of the Highly Skilled Migrants Programme (HSMP) forum, representing highly skilled Indians in the UK has urged Indian Government to take up plight of HSMP visa holders with British Prime Minister's recent visit to India because fate of thirty thousand Indians is at stake and they are likely to face deportation; and

(c) if so, the reaction of British Prime Minister thereto?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) Yes.

(b) Yes.

(c) The Joint Statement signed by the two Prime Ministers at the conclusion of the India-UK Summit on January 21, 2008 noted the importance of facilitating movement of professionals across a broad range of sectors of interest to both sides.

Passport office in Tamil Nadu

1468. SHRI S. ANBALAGAN: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Union Government proposes to open any passport office in the State of Tamil Nadu;

(b) if so, the details of the place where the new passport office is proposed to be opened and if not, the reasons therefor;

(c) the number of passport applications received and the number of passports issued during the stipulated time period during each of the last three years, passport office-wise in the State; and

(d) the reasons for pendency in issuing the passports?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) and (b) Yes. It is proposed to open a new Passport Office in Coimbatore.

(c) The total number of passport applications received and the number of passports issued during last three years by the Passport Offices in Tamil Nadu are given below:

Passport Office	Number of Passport Applications received			Number of Passports issued		
	2005	2006	2007	2005	2006	2007
Chennai	237561	291916	299488	212143	300503	305238
Tiruchirappalli	225403	279713	287862	220429	303684	285627
Madurai (opened in December 2007)	—	—	2965	—	—	346

(d) There are several reasons for pendencies in Passport Offices. These include: Delays in receipt of Police Verification Reports (PVRs) and adverse/incomplete PVRs; incomplete

information and/or documents furnished by the applicants. Rapidly growing workload of the Passport Offices is also contributing to pendencies.

Tourism between India and Pakistan

1469. KUMARI NIRMALA DESHPANDE: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether there is any proposal to encourage pilgrim between India and Pakistan, like Katasraj, Hinglaj Mata, Taksila in Pakistan and Ajmer Shariff, Nizamuddin and Charar-e-Shariff in India;

(b) the facilities being planned to encourage the pilgrim tourists; and

(c) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) to (c) An Indian proposal to increase both the number of shrines and pilgrims under the Bilateral Protocol on Pilgrimages is being pursued with the Government of Pakistan for over three years. A new visa agreement is also being discussed with Pakistan which, when finalised, would help in easing travel between the two countries, including for those intending to visit religious shrines in Pakistan and India.

Claims of Gulf war victims

1470. SHRI SYED AZEEZ PASHA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the reasons for SKC (Special Kuwait Cell) not disbursing the money despite the approval of United Nation Compensation Commission (UNCC) in regard to claims of the Gulf war victims from Kuwait;

(b) the efforts Government is contemplating to clear the claims of untraced persons;

(c) the basis of putting them into the category of untraced claims and the remedial measures by the Ministry; and

(d) the efforts of Government to track the untraced claimants?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) The deadline for submission of claims by the UNCC was 01.01.1995. The Special Kuwait Cell has already disbursed approximately US$ 1 billion in claims. This covers he preponderant majority of claims received before the deadline.

(b) to (d) The term untraced Claimants was coined by the UNCC for cases where compensation had been returned undisbursed to UNCC. The compensation could not be disbursed for a variety of reasons, such as change of address not being intimated to SKC and the UNCC reducing the permitted period of disbursement from 12 months to 6 months.

On receipt of a list of 8000 valid Untraced claimants in 2005 from the UNCC, the SKC launched a comprehensive campaign to locate the claimants and clear their claims. As a result, 3128 claimants have received their compensation amounts. However, all the untraced claimants could not be located for a variety of practical difficulties and once the final deadline of January 2008, prescribed by the UNCC for disbursement of funds to individual claimants expired, the undisbursed funds have reverted to the UNCC.